

# **WELLNESS FACT SHEET For Parents**

### Good Nutrition and Physical Activity — Now Part of the School Day

Today, children are three times more likely to be overweight or obese than their counterparts were just twenty years ago, and childhood obesity rates in America have soared beyond epidemic proportions.

Since many children spend 8 to 10 hours a day at school, including before and after-school sports, clubs, and activities, schools are ideal places for students to learn about the importance of healthy eating and regular physical activity. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 requires most schools to develop and implement Wellness Policies by the start of the 2006-2007 school year.

These policies state that schools must accommodate for:

- Nutrition lessons incorporated in the classroom
- Physical activity during the school day
- Guidelines for healthier foods and beverages in school cafeterias, stores and vending machines
- Other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness

### **Good News: Parents Back School Wellness**

In 2005, an Action for Healthy Kids nationwide survey found that most parents want schools to require nutrition and physical education and to offer healthful food options (like fruits, vegetables, low-fat/fat-free milk, and whole grains) at school. Parents also said they would like schools to promote physical activity by scheduling daily recess, physical education, and after-school programs that promote healthy snacks and physical activity. In a recent survey conducted by the National PTA, 65% of parents said a school nutrition/physical activity policy is important to them. However, the survey indicated that only 1 in 5 parents are likely to be involved in developing and implementing their child's school Wellness Policy.

### **How Can Parents Help?**

### Do a Status Check

Visit the school, eat a school lunch, and talk to the teachers, principals, administrators and foodservice directors in your district to find out:

- How do I obtain a copy of the new Wellness Policy?
- Are students able to easily choose healthy options?
- How much time is provided for physical activity, including physical education and recess?
- What are students or parents selling as part of fundraising efforts?
- Does the school have a School Health/Wellness Council I can join?

### Spread the Word

Use school or PTA calendars, newsletters, bulletin boards, school websites, email and word-of-mouth to inform other parents, friends and neighbors about the new Wellness Policies and the role schools can play to improve nutrition and physical activity in children and youth.

### **Take Action**

A great way to become more involved at your child's school is to take part in the development and implementation of Wellness Policies at the building level.

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# THE P.A.R.E.N.T. PROCESS

# Pick a Project

Improving School Wellness

## **Assess the Situation**

- 1. Ask about the school Wellness Policy. Find out if the district or school has a school Health/Wellness Council, or other planning committee that focuses on health and wellness. Contact this group, and find out what its goals are and how you can help.
- **2.** Discover what the Council is doing to implement their new Wellness Policy and who (teachers, students, nurse, parents) is on the committee for implementing and evaluating these plans.

# Research

- **1.** Review the Wellness Policy to find out what its goals are to improve nutrition and physical activity opportunities.
- 2. Identify tools and materials that can help guide your project area.

# Educate

- 1. Let the school know you would like to be involved in the Wellness Policy process and activities
- **2.** Share the resources you have found with administrators, teachers, school nurses, and foodservice personnel.
- 3. Provide suggestions/recommendations to alternatives to food fundraisers, food rewards, etc.

# etwork

- **1.** Gather the support of other parents and concerned community members.
- **2.** Discuss the school Wellness Policy at PTA meetings. Invite members of the school Health/Wellness council to present at a PTA meeting.
- **3.** Promote information concerning your school's Wellness Policies to parents and others in the community. (The PTA is a great vehicle for this.) Many parents are not yet aware of this opportunity to make positive health strides in their child's school environment.

# Take Action

- 1. If topics are not fully addressed, suggest changes and additions to the Wellness Policy.
- **2.** Work with the Council to include missing topics and/or key points.

Action for Healthy Kids is pleased to acknowledge the assistance of the National PTA (www.pta.org) in developing this fact sheet. Information in this fact sheet is referenced in:

Ohio Action for Healthy Kids. Make Positive Changes in Your Schools: Parent Guide to Creating Nutrition and Physical Activity Changes in Schools. Action for Healthy Kids. Parents' Views on School Wellness Practices.

These publications, along with many other resources for parents, are available at <a href="https://www.ActionForHealthyKids.org">www.ActionForHealthyKids.org</a>